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ABSTRACT

Interviews were conducted with six Israeli junior high school teachers with the aim of identifying personal dilemmas they faced as teachers. Three of the interviewees were novice teachers; three more experienced. The subjects taught in Arab villages, a religious vocational Jewish school, and in a Kibbutz. Several educational contexts which give rise to teacher dilemmas were identified. The transition context created dilemmas for novices, which were related to professional identity and abilities, group membership, interpersonal relationships, and teacher status. Another context of teacher dilemmas was found to be within the areas of teacher planning and curriculum. Ethical problems and issues caused dilemmas in the context of classroom management. The societal context giving rise to dilemmas included moral and political issues and ideologies. Two major explanatory frames for teacher dilemmas were identified: the gap between ideology and reality, and the multiple obligations with which teachers are confronted. (JD)

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Teachers' Professional Dilemmas

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Perspective

Recent societal demand for teacher accountability and professionalization and the nature of uncertainty in a technological, mobile society, add to the complexity of the teaching profession. Consequently, teachers encounter a variety of problems and of conflicting views which place a heavy burden on their shoulders. Their inner world may become fraught with dilemmas that they have to manage. Furthermore, the teaching profession as such constitutes a variety of dilemmas that emerge from its ambiguous nature (Shulman, 1984), and from its aims and means which are often contradictory (Jackson, 1968; Lortie, 1975). The ambiguous educational roles have been analyzed and classified into a general hierarchical taxonomy (Berlak & Berlak, 1981). However, the investigation of teachers' dilemmas constitutes both general and idiosyncratic aspects (Berlak & Berlak, 1982; Lampert, 1985, 1986). Hence, the study of the dilemmas of groups as well as of individual teachers becomes a necessary procedure for understanding their inner world. This inner world of teachers' dilemmas is a matter of interest and concern to educationists, researchers and educational policy makers. Information regarding the content and nature of teachers' dilemmas is interesting from a theoretical as well as from a practical point of view. Theoretically, it may shed some light on

their values, attitudes and perceptions concerning various educational and professional issues, and at the same time characterize them as reflective professionals. Thus, it may add to the understanding of the teaching profession itself. Practically, it may guide teacher educators and professional developers in planning professional development programmes and in helping teachers to clarify and manage their dilemmas. Before relating to dilemmas more specifically, some elaboration regarding the meaning of the concept is in order.

A dilemma is perceived as an inner conversation with oneself concerning two or more alternate propositions, or assumptions that may be adopted; an argument that presents an antagonist with several possible views; a choice between two alternate courses of affairs in which the presence of obstacles on every side makes it difficult to determine which course of action to pursue (Berlak & Berlak, 198; Lampert, 1985). A dilemma is also viewed as a cognitive knot (Wagner, 1984) and as a situation in which a person's different ways of thinking are not congruent with the specific needs of that situation (Perkins, 1985).

The literature on dilemmas in the realm of education is relatively scarce. Berlak & Berlak (1981) classified dilemmas into three groups: Control dilemmas, curriculum dilemmas, and social dilemmas. Control dilemmas are described in terms of foci, for example: pupil vs. teacher centered teaching; teacher vs. external and vs. pupil set standards and norms. The dilemmas within the currriculum group pertain to personal vs. public knowledge as given vs. knowledge as problematic; content vs.

process; intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation. The social realm entertains dilemmas that relate to the perception of childhood as a unique situation, or rather as a stage in the process of development; perception of culture as consisting of general characteristics or rather of idiosyncratic characteristics of sub-cultures.

The source of these dilemmas resides in the ambiguity concerning the roles of schools in a changing society, which in turn creates dilemmas in teaching situations. Ambiguities in teaching situations are interpreted by Halkes & Dykers (1984) as stemming from personal and subjective values which are often incongruent with the needs that arise in classroom realities. They reflect ambiguities which are brought to consciousness in contexts of innovations. According to Wagner (1984), a person who finds him/herself in a situation of contradictory cognitions is apt to act in spiral cycles without being able to find a solution. Such a situation is regarded by Wagner (ibid) as a cognitive knot which may grow into a dilemma. She defines dilemmas as cognitive knots and conflicts, resulting from the gaps between what ought to be and what really occurs. There are several basic types of knots: Reality knots - result from some principle that has not been applied; Past experience knots - result from a gap between what had to be done and what was done in reality; Anticipation knots - result from an anticipation of something that will happen in the future but should not happen; Imperative dilemma knots - result from a conflict between two norms; Counter imperative knots - result from contradictory principles; and finally: knots

that result from double loyalty.

According to another perception, dilemmas occur in situations in which two conceptions may be intrinsically right but do not fit into a certain environment (Perkins, 1985). In addition to definitions, to contents and situations in which dilemmas are apt to occur, the topic of dilemma management has attracted some interest. Wagner (1984) describes this process as a search for balance between reality and what ought to become reality. Furthermore, this process depends upon the intensity of the experienced dilemmas and the way in which they are expressed, as well as upon the extent of proximity to the self. In referring to dilemma management, Buchman (1984) suggests that dilemmas are treated by a series of activities, some of which are intended to avoid confrontation between opposing views, others are temporary solutions of dilemmas that can not be resolved. Lampert (1985) expresses the view that management of dilemmas is intuitive, it fits a certain moment. The selection of a solution can not be predicted. One aspect of dilemma management is built in its definition as an internal conversation, in which the teacher deliberates upon alternate possible solutions. According to Lampert (ibid), the dilemma manager makes use of previously learnt strategies, while reframing them. Accordingly, she classifies dilemma management into three groups. One, pertains to the social reorganization of teaching, the other to a strategy of inner negotiations, and the third is a combination of the former two groups.

It is the aim of the present study to disclose the context and content of dilemmas of teachers of various seniority and in various educational environments.

Method

As the intent of the study was to disclose some of the content of dilemmas encountered by teachers, and the contexts in which they occur, rather than to provide specific findings to a-priori defined hypotheses, interpretive methods of search seemed to be appropriate (Erickson, 1986). The selected method of inquiry was in-depth open ended interviews. After establishing a relationship of rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee, each interview started with the following question: "Could you please tell about and relate to dilemmas that you may encounter in your work as a teacher?" If needed, this question was elaborated as follows: "Please tell me about situations in which you were confronted with alternatives which you perceived as possibly leading to equally desirable/undesirable results". The flow of talk was not interrupted unless some probing and clarification questions were needed. The interviewed subjects were six Junior High School teachers, three of them in their first two years of teaching. The seniority of the other three teachers was 4, 10 and 19 years. Among the three novice teachers two taught in Arab villages, and the third one in a religious vocational Jewish school. Two of the more senior teachers taught in Arab villages and the third one in a Kibbutz. The interviews were protocolled verbatim and analyzed in an attempt at disclosing the content of dilemmas, the context in which they occur and the possible reflection of background variables in the encountered dilemmas.

Findings

Findings are reported separately for teachers with different backgrounds. No attempt is made to generalize from the findings, but rather to gain insights into the nature of possible dilemmas teachers encounter in their professional lives.

We start with presenting the findings related to context and content. By context we mean the situation which gives rise to the dilemma. By content we mean the topic of the dilemma in the specific context.

Novice teachers. Three novice teachers participated in our study, with 1-2 years of seniority.

One of the teachers was 22 years old, still a University student, teaching History and English in a vocational religious high school. This teacher spoke about her major dilemma, namely, the dilemma of professional identity. After one and a half year of teaching she was torn between her initial commitment to teaching, and her desire to continue her studies in another field. The context of her dilemma was the transition from student to professional teacher. Transition has temporal, as well as substantive aspects. The content of the dilemma was the choice between different careers: "Is it worthwhile to be a teacher?" The transition context was characterized by another dilemma, related to the teacher's perception of her professional abilities. "I don't know anything about teaching, and am afraid of the students... the students (Ethiopians who are making their first steps in an unfamiliar environment and lack basic skills),

seem to be uncapable of learning... I gave them the same exercises that we solved in class and they did not know what to do. I am stunned". The dilemma is between putting the "blame" for failure on oneself, the novice teacher, or on the environment, the unmotivated and ignorant students. This dilemma was accompanied by great tension and feelings of uncertainty. On one hand the teacher was aware of her obligations and knew that pedagogical principles demand that she responds to the specific needs of her students. On the other hand, she did not have the appropriate tools to handle the situation, and sensed she was not ready to be held accountable for her failures. Other contexts which are revealed in the interview with this teacher are: teacher planning and classroom management. In the context of her planning activities the teacher mentioned the dilemma of choosing between coverage and in-depth teaching of any subject. In the context of classroom management decisions she raised the issue of appropriate punishment. "Should I send a student who disturbs the whole class outside, or should I try to keep him in the classroom?" The first solution may be easier for the teacher, and may allow her to continue her teaching for the benefit of the whole class, but may be pedagogically wrong for the student. After reading the protocol the teacher commented: "All this is quite confused, it reflects how I feel". The sense of confusion may also account for the presentation of what may be called a paradoxical dilemma. In the context of classroom management the teacher spoke abut her dilemma in responding to students' questions. She was not sure how to deal with "questions to which she does not know the answer". It seems that in spite of her

perception of her students as extremely weak and unknowledgeable, she still sees "students" as threatening. This may be a typical instance of the kind of dilemmas that novice teachers face in their first transition years.

A second novice teacher is a University graduate. This is his first year of teaching in an Arab village. It is interesting to note that he does not mention any doubts about his choice of career. It may be that his decision has already been made. Dilemmas that characterize his transition context are in the realm of relations with his colleagues and with the principal. "Should I accept the advice of senior teachers? How far should I try to become involved in the life of the school? Would it not be more convenient for me to be less active? What is the best way to impress my principal?" These questions reflect the dilemma between professionalism and interpersonal relations in the workplace. Is it more important to adhere to one's own pedagogical principles, or should one sacrifice these for the sake of better relations with one's peers? On the other hand, how can one reconcile between the need to accept necessary advice from more experienced colleagues, and the need to be autonomous?

This teacher also mentioned several dilemmas in the context of teacher planning and in the context of classroom management. Shoulds I add materials to the textbook or should I adhere to it faithfully?" This question reflects a curricular dilemma of fidelity to the prescribed curriculum.

Classroom management presents the dilemma of punishment. "How to deal with a talkative student? What is the right kind of punishment? Should I be harsh or forgiving?"

It seems that the teacher is torn between competing professional principles, and at this stage of his professional development has not enough personal practical experience and knowledge to manage these dilemmas.

The third novice teaches English for the second year in an Arab village. She shares some dilemmas in the context of transition with the second novice, mentioned above. She too is concerned about the "right" way of relating to her colleagues. "I am deliberating whether I should develop my own way of teaching, or accept the advice of other teachers? Generally my colleagues tell me their problems and advise me not to act as they had, because they had failed. I tell myself that their success or failure may be related to their personality, and not to the nature of their students or to the features of the strategy they had used. My dilemma is whether to accept their advice and to rely on their experience, or to experience success and failure on my own?" This is not just an issue of autonomy versus dependency, but also an issue of the status of a newcomer to an established educational institution. "As a new teacher I came to this school with my own expectations and my own educational goals. During the first months of teaching some of the senior teachers came to me and told me: 'You are a new and idealist teacher, you are so active because you are new. Your enthusiasm will diminish the more experience you will have, then you will be a teacher like all of

us'. I don't know whether to continue in my own way or to try to adapt to them?" Moreover, the novice in a school faces the dilemma of group identity. This teacher said: "As a new teacher I recognized the existence of groups in the commonroom. I asked myself, should I try to join the group with which I identify most strongly, or should I try to be friends with everyone?" There is a social and professional price to pay for each of these decisions, and the novice teacher was bewildered by the situation.

Difficult dilemmas confront this teacher in the context of classroom management: "In the school homeroom teachers use to ask one of the students to report cases of not preparing homework, or of classroom disturbances during lessons taught by other teachers, I asked myself, why should a student do such a thing? This may cause all kinds of undesired outcomes. On the other hand it is a school custom. What should I do?" In this case the teacher focuses on an issue of classroom ethics in the relationships between students. The teacher is also concerned abour her own relationship with the students. "Should I keep a distance, or should I try to become their friend?" In the context of teacher planning this teacher faces the dilemma of implementing new teaching modes which she learned in her teacher education program, or, using the old and tried modes of teaching she knows so well from her own student years. It is interesting to note that this young and inexperienced teacher sees ethical issues as most problematic, whether these are issues of classroom justice, personal autonomy, or interpersonal relationships with

colleagues.

Experienced teachers. Three of the teachers who participated in the study, had 4, 10 and 19 years of seniority.

The teacher with 4 years of seniority is a University graduate and teaches in an Arab village. Though teaching for four years he still is not sure about his choice of career. This is his major dilemma: "Should I continue to be a teacher? If I remain a teacher I am acting against my wishes, if I do not continue I have no profession, besides I have invested a lot of time and effort in learning to teach". After 4 years in the profession he apparently feels that he is still in a transition period, not temporally but substantively. His dissatisfaction with his present work strengthens this feeling, his professional identity is not yet strong. Other dilemmas mentioned by this teacher relate to the planning context and to classroom management. He is not sure about the "right" way to plan and structure a lesson, and can see the relative merit of each teaching mode. Another dilemma in this context concerns the planning of a student trip. Should his students decide about the route, as the trip is for their enjoyment, or should he assume full responsibility, because of his role as teacher. The teacher has many dilemmas in the context of classroom management. One concerns the issue of corporal punishment, which is still used in his school. According to his pedagogical beliefs this is wrong, but "students seem to ask for it". The dilemma of teacher control concerns him. Should he let classroom discussions flow freely, according to the interests of his students, or, be restrictive and guide the

discussion according to his intentions. He can see advantages in each of these decisions and does not know what to do. This teacher shares another dilemma with one of the novices. He does not know to handle student questions when he is not sure of the correct answer. "I speculate whether to give a non-relevant answer or, to face up to the fact that I do not know and to propose to answer another time". In this case that is not a "paradoxical dilemma", as the teacher seems to regard his students highly. The teacher wavers between his need for a status of authority in the eyes of his students, and his awareness that it is important to present a model of searching for knowledge. It may well be the case that the number of years one teaches are not, necessarily, the most important factor in determining the issues which cause dilemmas for teachers.

Moreover, 4 years of teaching may not be enough to qualify anyone as an experienced teacher.

The second teacher has 10 years of seniority and teaches in English in a Kibbutz school. This teacher differentiated between her past and present dilemmas. Her past dilemmas were mainly in the context of classroom management. "I faced more dilemmas as a young teacher, but that was not important... should I leave the class in tears?... Sometimes I managed to solve the dilemmas." She does not consider these past experiences of grappling with dilemmas as significant, though they centered on her own personal feelings and behaviors, nor does she seem to attach importance to her attempted solutions.

When she speaks about her present dilemmas she is very intense and expresses a high level of concern and care. These are dilemmas which are closely linked to the societal context of the Kibbutz. She mentions the permissiveness of Kibbutz society as creating dilemma situation. "Intimate relationships between students, who move into a 'family room', are an example of such a situation. On one hand, we are very open. On the other hand, there exist strong normative forces which demand some kind of intervention". In the Kibbutz the teacher is expected to deal with such situations.

The status and image of the Kibbutz teacher also cause dilemmas. "In an urban school teachers are not involved in the daily lives of their students after school hours. In the Kibbutz the teacher meets students in the dining hall, at the work place (where students work in the afternoon as part of their daily schedule), and with their parents. The discipline of Kibbutz students is different from that of city students. In the Kibbutz it is not clear that teachers are to be treated with respect". The teacher perceives her students as unmotivated and passive. Her dilemma is how to react to this situation. Should she be accepting or should she try to change it. The teacher confronts dilemmas whenever her own ideals and values are in conflict with Kibbutz reality. It is interesting to note that in discussing ways of handling the dilemmas she mentions the cooperative nature of dealing with problems in the Kibbutz. "I bring dilemmas to the group for discussion and solution". Another feature of dilemma management in the Kibbutz is also related to the egalitarian character of

Kibbutz society, namely, trying to solve problems through persuasion and not through imposition of decisions. These modes of handling dilemmas leave the teacher in a state of intense inner "conversations", which do not lead to satisfactory solutions.

The Kibbutz teacher does not see teacher planning as causing any dilemmas. "We are completely autonomous in curriculum matters. I choose what I want to teach. I am not confined to the textbooks recommended by the Ministry of Education. I decide what and how to teach". It is interesting that the teacher does not seem to recognize curriculum issues as sources for dilemmas. Dilemmas appear in those situations which relate to her worldview, her ideology and beliefs, where ideals are in conflict with reality. Lampert (1984) suggests that gaps between ideology and reality constitute the main dilemma source. This is evident in the case of the experienced Kibbutz teacher.

We turn to the teacher with 19 years of seniority. He teaches Geography in an Arab high school. Some of his dilemmas are related to the societal context. In teaching the geography of Israel he finds himself torn between two ideological positions, the Jewish and the Arab perception of the identity of the country. "It happens that when I try to teach the geography of Israel the students reject this topic. What should I do? Should I teach the subject so as to fulfill the requirements of the curriculum, or should I use this opportunity to discuss the political issues involved?" Students in his class come from two different social backgrounds, city and village. They have

different values and behavioral norms. This situation gives rise to classroom management dilemmas, such as how to organize a trip or a class party, which of the two groups to prefer? How to integrate them without having anyone give up their own cultural modes of behavior?

In the teacher planning context the teacher mentions difficulties with textbooks, which are sources of dilemmas. The Geography textbook "is badly translated. I find myself in a dilemma whether to demand that all students buy the book, or to teach without the textbook, relying on my own lectures and explanations". There is a conflict of principles involved in this decision and the teacher finds it difficult to choose. Teachers are not supposed to be the sole source of knowledge, on the other hand, a textbook which is not acceptable to the teacher makes its use highly undesirable.

It seems that for this teacher, as for the Kibbutz teacher, the gap between ideology and reality is the source for the most significant dilemmas.

In addition to the findings reported in the previous section two salient observations worthwhile of attention emerged. The first pertains to the tones of reference (Fox, 1969). While some teachers referred to their dilemmas in a somewhat indifferent tone others expressed some anxiety and confusion. After having read the protocol of her interview one teacher remarked: "Everything is so confusing... it reflects the way I feel..." Another teacher kept sighing during the interview. A feeling of

uneasiness as a result of having to be accountable on the one hand, and not being able to solve her dilemmas, on the other, was reported by a third teacher. The Kibbutz teacher reacted with some anger when she referred to her dilemmas in the area of values. The overall impression from all the interviews was that dilemmas were regarded as disturbing.

The second emerging observation points to a generic vs. specific nature of the mentioned dilemmas. For instance, while the classroom management dilemmas appear to be of a general nature, dilemmas such as: "Shall I teach according to the Arab conception or rather to the Zionist conception..." is of a specific nature, as it is a situational bound dilemma, and so are other dilemmas that stem from the Kibbutz situation. Other dilemmas may be classified as person bound, that is, they stem from a personal source, such as dilemmas pertaining to professional identity.

Discussion

Several educational contexts which give rise to teacher dilemmas were identified in this study.

Some of these were more common among teachers with little seniority, others were shared by all teachers. The transition context created dilemmas for novices, or teachers with little teaching experience, such as 4 years of seniority. The content of transition dilemmas related to the following issues: professional identity; professional abilities; group membership; interpersonal relationships and teacher status. It seems that at the early stages of professional development teachers have not yet formed

their sense of professional identity. They tend to have many doubts about their choice of a profession, and are uncertain about their abilities to fulfill their professional obligations. They are in a state of conflict between the knowledge they have acquired in the teacher education programs, and the reality of school life, between their perception of self and the expectations of the educational establishment. They are torn between the need to develop their autonomous style, and their desire to belong to the community they have joined. Interpersonal relations and perceptions of teacher status are important dilemma foci. The state of transition is not to be understood in temporal terms only. Even after teaching a number of years teachers may still feel unsure about their vocation, and may express transition dilemmas.

Teacher planning and curriculum are another context of teacher dilemmas. The prevailing dilemma relates to issues of autonomy versus fidelity to external curricula. It is interesting to note that the Kibbutz teacher who participated in this study seems to be immune to this dilemma. This finding is compatible with findings in a study of the curricula of the Kibbutz school (Ben-Peretz and Lavi, 1980), which showed that teachers in Kibbutz schools tend to view themselves as autonomous in the curriculum domain. On the other hand, teachers may find themselves in a dilemma whether to use a prescribed textbook, even if they consider it unfit. One of the teachers in our study claimed that he was reluctant to rely solely on his own lectures and explanations. One of the common dilemmas in the context of

teacher planning relates to the perennial issue of coverage versus in-depth teaching of any topic. This seems to be a perfect case for the kind of dilemma management which Lampert talks about: "..the image of teacher as dilemma manager accepts conflict as a continuing condition with which persons can learn to cope" (Lampert, 1985 p. 192).

The "right" way of planning a lesson is another dilemma that may concern teachers, especially in their early years of teaching. Expert teachers, such as Nancy (Shulman, 1987), may employ their own conceptual framework to guide their planning, and may master a flexible style that adapts itself to their specific situation. Thus, expert teachers may no longer be confronted with this kind of dilemma.

Ethical problems and issues cause teachers' dilemmas in the context of classroom management. How to punish one's students is a dilemma for novice teachers in our study. Ethical questions are raised as dilemmas regarding the interpersonal relationships of students and the interaction between students and teachers. Some of these are "control dilemmas", in Berlak and Berlak's sense (1981). It seems to us that it would be worthwhile effort to probe deeper the complexities of ethical dilemmas of teachers.

We turn now to the societal context which may give rise to teachers' dilemmas. Some of the dilemmas of the Kibbutz teachers, or of the Arab teachers who participated in the study, may be interpreted as pertaining to the societal context. The special status of teachers in the Kibbutz, and the nature of Kibbutz

society, may cause conflicts for a teacher who brings a different set of values into the classroom. The teacher in our study is fully aware to the fact that she confronts dilemmas whenever her own ideals and commitments do not match Kibbutz reality. It is especially interesting to note how this teacher's attempts to handle her dilemmas are shaped by Kibbutz ideology. In the Kibbutz society dilemma management is a communal and cooperative venture.

As is to be expected, the Arab teachers experience dilemmas regarding their national identity as a minority group living in a country with many problems. The two cases briefly described in our study point to the fact that it is impossible to detach the classroom, as a dilemma raising environment, from the external world.

Trying to sum up some of the insights gained in this study we may discern between two major explanatory frames for teacher dilemmas. One is the gap between ideology and reality (Lampert, 1985), and the difficulties that this gap causes in the teacher's perception of self. The other explanation concerns the multiple obligations that teachers confront, which may be the key to many dilemmas (Shulman, 1983).

The notion of "paradoxical dilemmas", namely, dilemmas which originate in paradoxical views of a situation, may contribute to the investigation of teacher thinking. It would be interesting how widespread the phenomenon of paradoxical dilemmas is, and how it is related to the nature of the teaching situation.

The generally negative tone in which dilemmas were expressed are a matter of concern, as it is only natural for any profession, and especially a developing profession like teaching, to be fraught with dilemmas. Furthermore, dilemmas present a challenge to deliberate and think upon, and hence are a potential source of development. Viewed as disturbing and unpleasant dilemmas may lose their power to promote professional growth.

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